

MONO COUNTY GENERAL PLAN DRAFT EIR

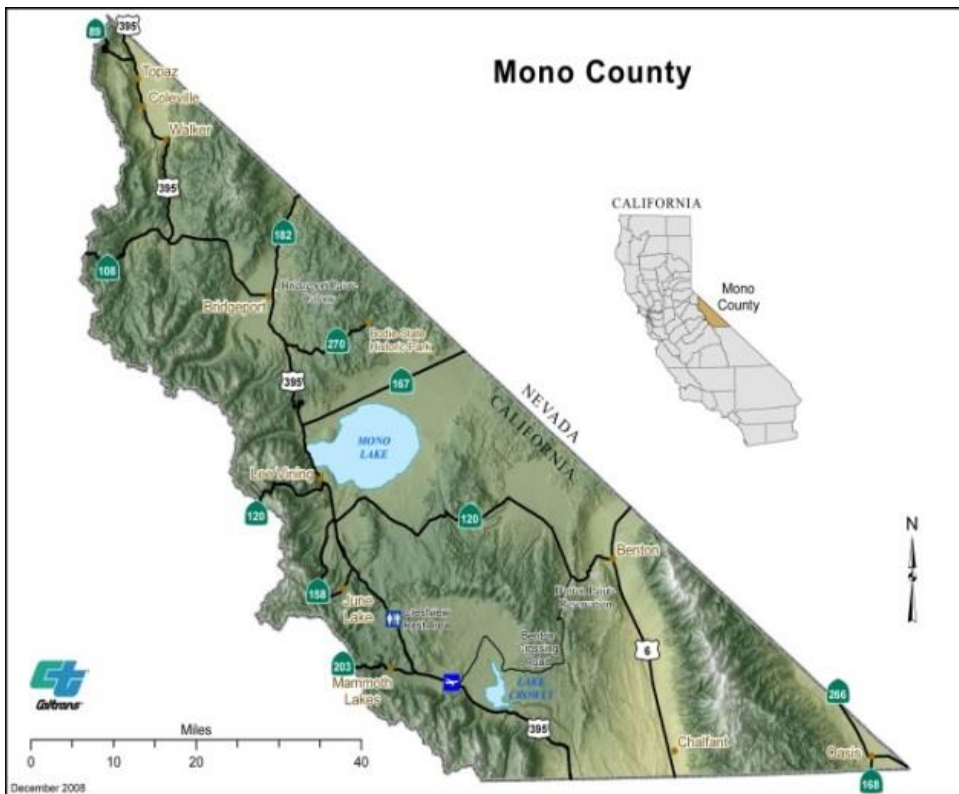


SECTION 3.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

3.1 PROJECT LOCATION AND SETTING

The proposed update to the *Regional Transportation Plan* (hereafter referred to as the RTP) and the *Mono County General Plan* involves plans, activities and policies that may impact lands throughout the 3,132-square mile area of Mono County, which is located on the eastern slopes of the Sierra Nevada mountain range in the central portion of the state of California. As shown in the inset figure below, the county is relatively long (108 miles at the longest point) and narrow (with an average width of only 38 miles) with an extensive boundary along the Nevada state line. The County seat is located in Bridgeport, and the only incorporated town in Mono County is Mammoth Lakes, where 57% of the county population lives.

Figure 3-1: Regional Location Map



The remainder of the population lives in a number of small communities scattered throughout the county, principally in the communities of Topaz, Coleville, Walker, Bridgeport, Mono City, Lee Vining, June Lake, Long Valley, McGee Creek, Hilton Creek/Crowley Lake, Aspen Springs, Sunny Slopes, Wheeler Crest/ Swall Meadows, Paradise (all of which are located along the base of the Sierra), communities along the western flank of the White Mountains including Benton, Chalfant, Hammil Valley; and Oasis (located on the eastern flank of the White Mountains).

Mono County is among the least populous of California counties, with a 2010 Census of 14,202 residents. Human use and development have been and continue to be limited by the fact that approximately 94% of the county land area is in public ownership (including lands owned by the City of Los Angeles) and by the county's remote location and limited access with only one highway

(US 395) providing north-south access and three highways (US 6 and State Routes (SR) 167 and 182) providing access into Nevada. There are no routes providing direct access to the western part of the state during normal winter months, although SRs 89, 108 and 120 provide seasonal summer access from US 395 over the Sierra Nevada. The Project Study Area encompasses the entirety of unincorporated Mono County, as depicted in Figures 3-1 (Regional Location) and Figure 3-2 (Mono County boundaries and communities, shown below). Where relevant, discussion also includes lands within the incorporated Town of Mammoth Lakes. Existing and proposed *General Plan Land Use Element* maps are available online at: <http://monocounty.ca.gov/planning/page/mono-county-general-plan-update>.



FIGURE 3-2: Mono County Boundaries and Communities

3.2. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

CEQA §15124 requires that each EIR provide a clear statement of the underlying purpose and objectives of the proposed project. The objectives facilitate development of a reasonable range of alternatives, and also aid in the preparation of findings and a statement of overriding considerations, where required. Objectives of the proposed *RTP/General Plan Update* are listed below:

- Update the General Plan and RTP and Provide Long-Term Planning Guidance: Provide updates that are consistent with the Mono County vision and goals, and provide the County with long-term planning guidance in the form of specific objectives, policies, goals and programs that balance employment, housing, public services, economic growth, and recreational opportunities with the need to protect and maintain the county's environmental resources. Ensure that the updates address changes in circumstances, community priorities, and new requirements of law.
- Respect Community Preferences and Private Property Rights: Ensure that the RTP/General Plan and related planning efforts respect private property rights as well as the short- and long- term planning goals and objectives developed and recommended by the Mono County Planning Commission, Regional Planning Advisory Committees and communities. Within that framework, reflect the regional goals developed in collaboration with landowners, responsible and trustee agencies, regional planning partners, businesses and other stakeholders. Adopt policies and undertake programs that combine innovative planning and sound science with the values of Mono County residents to achieve a sustainable future.
- Protect the Outstanding Scenic, Recreational and Environmental Resources of Mono County: Consistent with the Vision of the Mono County General Plan, protect the outstanding scenic, biological and recreational values, and rural character of Mono County through environmentally responsible resource management, thorough analysis of potential impacts and alternatives and cumulative effects associated with the proposed RTP/General Plan Update and related planning initiatives, and cost-effective allocation of available funds.
- Facilitate Streamlining and Tiering of Future CEQA Documents and Provide Incentives for General Plan Compliance: Facilitate tiering of environmental documents to streamline CEQA compliance for future projects that conform to policies of the updated RTP and General Plan, consistent with the provisions of CEQA §15168(d). Encourage and support tiering as a means to reduce the cost and redundancy of CEQA compliance in Mono County while safeguarding environmental resources and encouraging projects that conform to the General Plan.
- Strengthen County Infrastructure: Incorporate policies that provide for sound and forward-looking development, management, and maintenance of capital facilities, communications facilities, and community services.
- Promote Resource Efficiency: The objective to achieve and maintain resource efficiency is an integral part of the proposed project, as expressed in policies and actions proposed for numerous elements of the RTP/General Plan Update. Additional specific objectives are to reduce GHG emissions by a) adopting a GHG reduction goal consistent with AB 32, b) developing estimates of feasible GHG reductions, c) integrating feasible measures into the updated General Plan as a set of adopted policies and specific actions, and d) complying with CEQA Guidelines §15183 to facilitate the assessment of future projects' compliance with adopted GHG policies and actions.
- Strengthen the Mono County Economy and Support Vibrant Rural Communities: As part of the current planning effort, the County has prepared an Economic Development Strategy that is intended to strengthen and enhance job opportunities and economic conditions throughout Mono County, and the initial principles and strategies are incorporated into the General Plan. As with many other project elements, the strategic plan includes strong provisions for multi-jurisdictional collaboration.

3.3 PROJECT BACKGROUND

The County last completed a comprehensive General Plan Update in 1993, along with a Final EIR and a separate Master Environmental Assessment (MEA). The MEA was prepared as a stand-alone document to streamline preparation of future environmental reviews and to facilitate periodic revisions apart from the formal General Plan amendment process.

In 2000, the County updated its General Plan Land Use Element. The revisions focused on three key goals: to integrate the zoning and development code into the General Plan, to amend the Land Use Plan accordingly, and to upgrade Land Use maps to provide greater detail for all areas of the county. As part of these revisions, the County prepared a new EIR (showing the same impacts and mitigations as identified in the 1993 EIR) and also updated its MEA. The 2001 MEA contained reformatted text and extensive updates to the environmental baseline data. The MEA was again updated informally by County staff during 2009-2010 in preparation for this *Mono County RTP/General Plan* project.

3-4 SCOPE OF THE RTP/GENERAL PLAN UPDATE

3-4.1 GENERAL PLAN ELEMENTS

The Mono County *RTP/General Plan Update* is a comprehensive and overarching policy document that will guide policy decisions throughout the 3,132-square mile planning area over the coming years. The current Mono County General Plan update addresses all seven of the mandatory General Plan Elements, as summarized below:

Land Use Element: The Land Use Element addresses all land use issues through a set of coherent development policies. The element describes the type and intensity of development that may occur, and contains specific policies for each of the community planning areas. The Land Use Element serves as the basis for determining service requirements, including plans for County roads, water and sewer, schools, and police and fire protection services. It is the determining factor for the future transportation system, as well as future noise compatibility issues. The proposed Land Use Element update would: a) clarify some land use designations and associated development standards, b) incorporate area plan policies and provide a summary of policies from adopted specific plans, c) include changes, regulations and policies to respond to new state law requirements, and d) provide forecasts for projected and ultimate development utilizing refined assumptions and recently developed countywide GIS mapping tools. Land Use Maps are available on line at: <http://monocounty.ca.gov/planning/page/mono-county-general-plan-update>.

Circulation Element/Regional Transportation Plan. Since the 1980s, the County has used the RTP (prepared by the Local Transportation Commission) as its Circulation Element. The Circulation Element describes streets and roads, highways, transit services, bicycle/pedestrian facilities, and other transportation services and facilities throughout the county and the planning area. This element also provides a plan for the future transportation, transit, and bicycle/pedestrian services and facilities necessary to accommodate and serve future development based on uses envisioned in the Land Use Element. A cornerstone goal of the current update is to ensure that the Element addresses infrastructure policies related to capital facilities and communications, infrastructure, and community services. The current Circulation Element update incorporates new communications policies and new policies on facilities, and draws on information from recently completed and ongoing Municipal Service Reviews prepared by the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO).

Conservation/Open Space Element: This element describes how the County will manage open space lands to preserve natural resources, resource production, outdoor recreation, and public health and safety. Policies address a wide range of resources: biological, hydrological, agricultural, mineral, energy, scenic, cultural, air quality, public health and timber. Resource information updates in this 2015 element focus on policies addressing energy, resource efficiency for greenhouse gas emission reductions, and integrated regional water management in the planning area. The update also includes new policies to comply with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), with particular emphasis on habitat assessments and mitigation policies to aid in avoiding the listing of additional species, particularly in areas where growth is expected to occur based on the *General Plan Land Use Element*.

Safety Element: The Safety Element identifies emergency preparedness and special development requirements as needed to safeguard areas subject to natural hazards. The natural hazards are defined as *"any reasonable risk associated with the effects of seismically induced surface rupture, ground shaking, ground failure, tsunami, seiches, and dam failure; slope instability leading to mudslides and landslides, subsidence and other geologic hazards known to the legislative body; flooding, and wildland and urban fires"* (CGC §65302). The purpose of the Safety Element is to reduce the potential risk of death, injuries, property damage, and economic and social dislocations from those hazards to the least practical amount. The Safety Element is prepared and implemented in coordination with the plans and actions of other local, state, and federal agencies. The Mono County Safety Element addresses fire hazards, flood hazards including flooding and dam failure, geologic hazards (landslides, seismic hazards and volcanic hazards), severe weather hazards, and emergency response. The current Safety Element update incorporates a multi-hazard mitigation plan update and new standards consistent with Fire Safe Rule 1270 (Fire Safe Regulations) and in keeping with requirements of the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 which is administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Mitigation

planning under this program is required to qualify for disaster assistance. Note that airport safety hazards are addressed in the *Draft Land Use Element*.

Noise Element: The Noise Element is used to guide decisions regarding land use and the location of roads and facilities that are the most common sources of excessive noise levels. The purpose of the Noise Element is to limit the exposure of the community to excessive noise levels through land use planning and policies that integrate noise compatibility as a part of future land use decisions. The current Noise Element update includes new noise measurements, corresponding policy adjustments, and an update to the implementing Noise Ordinance.

Hazardous Waste Management Element: As part of the current update, the County has folded the Hazardous Waste Management Element into the Integrated Waste Management Plan (see Related Planning Initiatives, below) to achieve a more comprehensive waste management program.

Housing Element: In compliance with State requirements, the County adopted the most recent Housing Element update and CEQA analysis during 2014. The updated Housing Element outlines six key strategies, with accompanying policies and programs, to fulfill the County's identified Regional Housing Need for 46 additional housing units to meet the needs of extremely low, very low, low, moderate and above-moderate-income residents for the period 2014-2019:

- Plan for adequate sites and facilities to support future housing needs;
- Pursue creative, economical and sustainable ways to house low- and moderate-income groups;
- Increase housing opportunities countywide, particularly in community areas, by limiting governmental constraints on housing development;
- Use conservation and rehabilitation to ensure the supply of safe, decent, sound housing for all residents;
- Promote equal housing opportunities for all persons, and
- Preserve low-income and/or employee housing that is at risk of conversion to market rates.

EIR §4.14 (Population and Housing) summarizes key findings, goals and policies from the 2014 Housing Element. The adopted Housing Element has also been referenced and integrated where appropriate with other elements (such as the Land Use Element build-out calculations).

3.4.2 RELATED PLANNING INITIATIVES

In tandem with the *RTP/General Plan Update*, Mono County and other agencies have also undertaken (or will undertake) a series of planning initiatives to enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors throughout and beyond Mono County. The *RTP/General Plan Update* proposes to incorporate relevant information and conclusions from these initiatives, including planning goals and policies where applicable. Note that the *Food Systems Study*, identified in the NOP as a project component, has since been placed on hold although some of the intended community food policies have been incorporated into the larger General Plan with a focus on healthy communities and food choices. The additional planning initiatives include:

Integrated Waste Management Plan: The County has integrated its Hazardous Waste Management Element into the more comprehensive Integrated Waste Management Plan (IWMP). The IWMP includes a *Household Hazardous Waste Element (HHWE)* to ensure the safe collection, recycling, treatment, and disposal of hazardous wastes that are generated by households; a *Countywide Siting Element (CSE)* that monitors landfill capacity, ensures that capacity does not fall below 15 years, and sets guidelines for the siting of new disposal facilities; and a *Non-Disposal Facility Element (NDFE)* that is used with the Siting Element to establish or expand non-disposal solid waste facilities such as transfer stations and recycling centers. The IWMP incorporates improvements in recycling and waste reduction, and reviews options for waste disposal after the closure of the regional Benton Crossing Landfill. There is a fourth element to the IWMP, the *Source Reduction and Recycling Element* (designed to reduce waste loads), that is updated annually and is not part of the current *RTP/General Plan Update*.

Biomass Utilization Study: The 2014 Biomass Feasibility Study was prepared by TSS Consultants under the aegis of the Eastside Biomass Project Team, a consortium of representatives from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), GC

Forest Products Inc., Inyo National Forest, Mammoth Lakes Fire Protection District, Mammoth Mountain Ski Area, Mono County, Sierra Nevada Conservancy, and the Town of Mammoth Lakes, with technical assistance from the Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District and Southern California Edison. The study goal was to evaluate the viability of siting a bioenergy facility in the central Mono County and Mammoth Lakes area using sustainably-available forest biomass sourced as a byproduct of forest management and fuels treatment programs. The study considered seven sites for locating a combined heat and power facility, and 7 sites for a biomass thermal project. Information from this study (which concluded that only thermal-only biomass utilization would be feasible due to sustainable supply requirements) were used to update energy, forest health, and fire hazard policies in the General Plan.

County Facilities and Community Services Infrastructure: This effort adds long-term planning goals and policies related to capital improvement projects, service infrastructure, and communication facilities, as well as enhanced long-term project planning coordination.

Parking Standards Study: Downtown parking standards have been revised and adopted for various Mono County communities. The revised parking standards are part of the RTP planning effort as well as the Scenic Byways and Main Street Revitalization efforts, and regulated via the Land Use Element.

Scenic Byways Plan: The County intends to apply for a federal 'scenic byway' designation for US 395. The Scenic Byways Plan is currently under development, and relevant information has been incorporated into the *RTP/General Plan Update*. Once completed, the Scenic Byways Plan will support the forthcoming application, and will address a corridor "brand," a catalogue of scenic values, community design themes, regional and community stories highlighting local character, and Main Street Revitalization efforts as described more fully below.

Main Street Revitalization Efforts: Main streets in most Mono County communities are also state highways, and must serve the needs of regional mobility as well as local safety and community values. The Main Street revitalization efforts focus on innovative community-specific improvements to achieve complete streets, walkable communities, and support local communities. Main Street goals and policies will complement the Scenic Byway planning effort and build upon the 2013 *Main Street Revitalization Plan for U.S. 395 Through Bridgeport*.

Character Inventory and Design Guidelines: The voluntary Main Street design handbook recently developed for Bridgeport has been well-received, and similar design handbooks were developed for other Main Streets in tandem with the Scenic Byways Plan noted above. These handbooks have been incorporated into the General Plan in the Design Guidelines appendix.

Countywide Trails and Bike Planning: Trail planning is a long-standing priority for Mono County. The RTP and General Plan include updated discussion of ongoing plans and progress in recent years including a conceptual 350-mile Eastern Sierra Regional Trail from Topaz Lake to Round Valley, community efforts to create a gateway trail connecting Lee Vining to Yosemite National Park, and numerous local community efforts, such as the June Lake Trails Committee. A Trails Plan and Bicycle Transportation Plan have been incorporated into the RTP as appendices.

Resource Efficiency and GHG Reduction Plan: As noted in §3.6.4 above, the new Resource Efficiency Plan (REP) is integrated into the General Plan to set forth Mono County's goals, policies and actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This plan functions in the same manner as a Climate Action Plan, but focuses more specifically on reduced Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions consistent with CEQA §15183.5. The County's main goals are to meet CEQA requirements for the RTP and General Plan updates, provide a GHG analysis and mitigation measures sufficient to enable tiering and CEQA streamlining, and identify and prioritize effective GHG reduction measures. County goals for reducing GHG emissions apply to all unincorporated areas of Mono County that are under the County's land use authority, as well as all County-owned or County-operated facilities and services, whether they are in the incorporated Town of Mammoth Lakes or in the unincorporated area. The REP was prepared as a stand-alone document fulfilling the requirements for a Plan for the Reduction of Greenhouse Gas Emissions identified in State CEQA Guidelines §15183.5. The policies and actions identified in the REP have been incorporated within the General Plan Land Use Element, Circulation Element, and Conservation/Open Space Element.

Landownership Adjustment Project: The County has completed a multi-agency landownership adjustment review to identify land tenure adjustment opportunities that best balance community needs, private property rights, land agency missions, and protection of critical land and water resources. The *January 2012 Landownership Adjustment Project* was funded by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy and conducted with the efforts of an Advisory Committee including BLM, US Forest Service, Mono and Inyo counties, local citizens and the Sierra Business Council. The project had four primary goals:

- Conduct an inventory of all potential agency lands available for disposal and identified for acquisition, and create a GIS database;
- Disseminate information pertaining to land-disposal policies, constraints and opportunities, and make the GIS land inventory accessible to the public;
- Conduct public workshops to identify community needs that could be addressed through the project, and identify potential landownership adjustments; and
- Based on the land inventory and community input, work collaboratively to facilitate mutually beneficial landownership adjustments and institutionalize policies to guide future efforts.

The current General Plan update incorporates policy changes recommended in the landownership adjustment review, including high-level blueprint directives as discussed below.

Blueprint Plan:¹ Regional Blueprints are collaborative planning processes that engage residents in articulating a vision for the long-term future of their region. The vision is developed from residents' values and priorities, and draws on advanced GIS modeling and visualization tools that illustrate the impacts associated with various growth and planning decisions. Because of landownership constraints in Mono County, the Landownership Adjustment Project served as growth scenario modeling with recommendations for consolidating agency lands and directing growth toward existing communities serving as the preferred growth scenario to guide regional and local land use and transportation decisions.

Economic Development Strategy: The county Economic Development Strategy consists of policies to strengthen and enhance job opportunities and economic conditions throughout Mono County. The effects of the recent recession have significantly impacted Mono County residents as well as others in the state and nation. Effects have included record unemployment, sizable budget shortfalls, and downturns across the major industries. The problems have continued well past the technical end of the recession, and are not yet fully resolved; the County's response to past downturn and recovery cycles has tended to lag the state and nation by a couple to several years. To support Mono County residents, the Economic Development Strategy Element identifies nine central strategies for enhancing the local economy, each with specific action items. Central strategy components include:

- Make Economic Development a Decision-Making Priority;
- Expand Tourism and Marketing;
- Integrate Digital 395 (D395) Strategies into Local Communities;
- Develop a US 395 Corridor Management Plan;
- Facilitate Small Business Education and Training;
- Create a Networking Environment;
- Continue to streamline the County's permitting process and review ways to simplify the approval process;
- Buy Local and Develop Regional Food Systems; and
- Develop Targeted Approach to Attracting Businesses to Mono County.

Though economic impacts are not a required part of the environmental review process, this EIR provides a summary overview of the EDE as part of the analysis contained in §7.1, Growth and Economic Effects.

Biological Conservation Policies: The Open Space/Conservation Element has been updated with biological conservation policies and mitigation strategies based on results of focused habitat reviews in selected areas of the

¹ Caltrans website: <http://calblueprint.dot.ca.gov/>.

county, and specific guidance provided for mitigating impacts to the Bi-State sage grouse, deer herds, Yosemite toad and Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog.

Watershed Plans: Mono County is one of 30 members of the Inyo-Mono Integrated Regional Water Management Program (IRWMP), part of a larger effort to enhance water management statewide. IRWMP projects are funded through grants from the Proposition 84 Stormwater Grant Program and must be used to reduce and prevent stormwater contamination of rivers, lakes and streams. Watershed plans have been prepared for the East Walker and West Walker basins, and are forthcoming for the Upper Owens & Mono Watershed basins; General Plan policies and goals have been proposed to implement IRWMP objectives and management strategies, as reviewed in this EIR.

Grading Regulations: Mono County Code §13.08.060 and 13.08.160 require the use of standard grading specifications in grading permits, and provide a streamlined permitting process to allow ministerial permit approval for complying projects. Policies in the *Draft Open Space and Conservation Element* support use of updated Low Impact Development (LID) strategies that reduce impacts to watershed that are associated with development.

Repeal of the Conway Ranch Specific Plan: The Conway Ranch Specific Plan was adopted in 1990 but rendered null and void by property restrictions imposed during public acquisitions. The General Plan update includes new use designations and policies that reflect the current restrictions and intent.

3.4.3 RTP & GENERAL PLAN REVIEW, UPDATE & FORECAST PERIODS

Many of the project components reviewed above have a time frame for projecting future conditions, and some components also have a fixed schedule for later reviews and updates. The *RTP* is reviewed and updated every four years, per State requirements. The *Housing Element* is reviewed and updated every eight years, also in compliance with State requirements. The *Resource Efficiency Plan* has two forecast horizons (2020 and 2035), and the County has established a goal to update the *Resource Efficiency Plan* every five years. Neither the State nor the County has a fixed requirement for updates to the other elements of the General Plan, and the County has not identified a specific date for 'buildout' of the General Plan. The remaining planning initiatives are undertaken and updated if and as determined by the County.

3.4.4 PROJECT PURPOSE AND INTENT

General Plan Goals and Policies: California Government Code (hereafter referred to as CGC) §65301(c) and §65302 require that a General Plan must address specified provisions for seven mandatory elements (land use, circulation, housing, conservation, open space, noise and safety) to the extent each of these provisions is locally relevant. Further, each of the required General Plan elements "*shall consist of a statement of development policies and shall include...text setting forth objectives, principles, standards and plan proposals.*" The 2003 General Plan Guidelines issued by the Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) indicate that individual counties and cities have considerable flexibility in organizing the required text. The Guidelines state that although the term "Goal" is not used in the legislation describing General Plan requirements, many jurisdictions (including Mono County) do incorporate goals, noting that this process often occurs as an initial step leading to the identification of more-specific objectives later in the process. The 2003 Guidelines offer the following definitions for use of these terms:

- **Objective:** An objective is a specified end, condition, or state that is an intermediate step toward attaining a goal. It should be achievable and, when possible, measurable and time specific. An objective may pertain to one particular aspect of a goal or it may be one of several successive steps toward goal achievement. Consequently, there may be more than one objective for each goal.
- **Goal:** A goal is a general direction setter...an ideal future end. A goal is a general expression of community values and, therefore, may be abstract in nature. Consequently, a goal is generally not quantifiable or time dependent.
- **Policy:** A policy is a specific statement that guides decision-making. It indicates a commitment of the local legislative body to a particular course of action. A policy is based on and helps implement a General Plan's objectives. A policy is carried out by implementation measures. For a policy to be useful as a guide to action it must be clear and unambiguous.

The 2003 General Plan Guidelines additionally state that *"while the terms 'goals' and 'objective' are used interchangeably in some general plans, many plans differentiate between broad, unquantifiable goals and specific objectives. Either approach is allowable, as flexibility is a characteristic of the general plan."* Mono County uses the term "goal" to represent far-reaching purposes and aims, supported by more narrowly defined objectives and specific policies and actions.

Regional Transportation Plan: CGC §65080 et seq. requires agencies to prepare an RTP, and to update the RTP at least every four years. The California Transportation Commission (CTC) encourages all areas to follow the federally mandated comprehensive planning process in order to develop uniform plans statewide. The purpose of an RTP is to:

- Provide a clear, realistic and feasible vision of the regional transportation goals, policies, objectives and strategies;
- Assess current modes of transportation and the potential for new travel options in the region;
- Project/estimate the future needs for travel and goods movement;
- Identify and document specific actions to address the mobility and accessibility needs;
- Guide and document public policy decisions regarding transportation expenditures and financing;
 - *Identify needed transportation improvements in sufficient detail to support development of the Federal Transportation Improvement Program (FTIP) and Interregional Transportation Improvement Program (ITIP);*
 - *Facilitate the integration of NEPA/404 process decisions;*
 - *Identify project purposes and need;*
- Demonstrate the effectiveness of transportation improvement projects in meeting the goals of MAP-21 (Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century);
- Promote consistency between the California Transportation Plan, the Regional Transportation Plan and local transportation plans;
- Provide a forum for participation and cooperation, and facilitate partnerships for resolving regional transportation issues; and
- Involve the public, federal, state and local agencies, and local elected officials early in the transportation planning process.

3.5 EIR SCOPE AND INTENDED USES OF THIS EIR

3.5.1 INTENDED USES OF THIS EIR

All of the policies and actions recommended in the RTP/General Plan Update, and all of the related planning initiatives, are conceptual in nature. This Draft EIR presents information about future projects to the extent such information is currently available, but does not analyze the potential environmental effects of any individual projects that may in the future be proposed. Subsequent CEQA documentation will be required to implement specific projects arising from all RTP/General Plan updates and planning initiatives.

3.5.2 SCOPE OF THIS EIR

This EIR reviews and analyzes at a conceptual level of detail the policies and actions proposed in the *RTP/General Plan Update* and the related planning initiatives as identified and described in §3.4.1 and §3.4.2. These updated RTP and General Plan elements and related planning programs are collectively referred to as the "project" or "the proposed project." Table 3-1 identifies the section(s) in this EIR that evaluate each of the project elements.

TABLE 3-1: Where Project Elements are Addressed in EIR	
Title	EIR Section
GENERAL PLAN ELEMENTS	
Land Use Element	EIR §4.1, Land Use
RTP / Circulation Element	EIR §4.2, Transportation and Circulation
Safety Element	EIR §4.7, Human Health and Safety
Conservation/Open Space Element	EIR §4.11, Recreation

Noise Element	EIR §4.17, Noise
Hazardous Waste Management Element	EIR §4.18, Hazards & Hazardous Materials
Economic Development Element	EIR §7.1, Growth and Economic Impacts
Housing Element	EIR §4.14, Population and Housing
RELATED PLANNING INITIATIVES	
Land Ownership Adjustment Report	EIR §4.1, Land Use & Relevant Planning
Repeal of Conway Ranch Specific Plan	EIR §4.1, Land Use
Capital Facilities, Transportation Improvements	EIR §4.2, Transportation and Circulation
Parking Standards Studies	EIR §4.2, Transportation and Circulation
Main Street Revitalization Efforts	EIR §4.2, Transportation and Circulation
Character Inventory and Design Handbooks	EIR §4.2, Transportation and Circulation
Resource Efficiency Plan	EIR §4.3, Air Quality & GHG
Grading Regulations	EIR §4.5, Geology and Soils
Watershed Plans	EIR §4.8, Hydrology, Water Quality, Water Resources
Countywide Trails Planning	EIR §4.9, Recreation
Scenic Byways Plan	EIR §4.10, Aesthetics, Light & Glare
Food Systems Study	EIR §4.11, Agriculture & Forestry Resources
Integrated Waste Management Plan	EIR §4.13, Public Services & Utilities
Biomass Utilization Study	EIR §4.13, Public Services and Utilities

Following adoption of the updated General Plan & RTP by the Mono County Board of Supervisors, all subsequent activities and development within the unincorporated county will be subject to the policies set forth in the new General Plan and RTP. Most activities undertaken pursuant to the General Plan and RTP will also be subject to additional compliance and entitlement requirements including tentative map approval, design review approval, use permit approval and other discretionary actions.

3.5.1 CEQA COMPLIANCE FOR GENERAL PLAN/RTP UPDATE

This Draft EIR was prepared in accordance with and in fulfillment of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the 2015 California CEQA Guidelines. As described in CEQA Guidelines §15121(a), “an *environmental impact report (EIR)* is a public informational document which will inform public agency decision makers and the public generally of the significant environmental effects of a project, identify possible ways to minimize the significant effects, and describe reasonable alternatives to the project.” CEQA requires that an EIR be prepared by the agency with primary responsibility over the approval of a project (the lead agency). This EIR has been prepared by the Mono County Community Development Department as Lead Agency for the proposed General Plan Update project and related planning initiatives. The Mono County Local Transportation Commission (LTC) will serve as a Responsible Agency with authority for consideration of this EIR and approval of the proposed *Regional Transportation Plan* (RTP). In fulfillment of its responsibility for approval of the RTP, the LTC has played an integral role in the development of both the RTP and this EIR, and has also contributed substantially to the funding of these efforts.²

As with other California public agencies, Mono County is charged with the duty to publicly consider the environmental impacts of activities that constitute ‘projects’ as defined by CEQA. The County has determined that the proposed Mono County *RTP/General Plan Update* and related planning initiatives do represent projects, as defined by CEQA, and are therefore subject to the requirement for environmental review. As part of the environmental review process, the County has an obligation to minimize or avoid potentially significant effects when it is feasible to do so based on applicable

² Staff of the Mono County Community Development Department also serves as staff of the Local Transportation Commission.

economic, environmental, legal, social and technological factors. Where such effects cannot feasibly be reduced to less-than-significant levels, the County must weigh and balance the environmental effects against economic and social factors before deciding whether to approve or deny the project proposal.

CEQA §15146 provides specific guidance for preparation of an EIR to evaluate the impacts of a proposed General Plan amendment:

"The degree of specificity required in an EIR will correspond to the degree of specificity involved in the underlying activity which is described in the EIR.

(a) An EIR on a construction project will necessarily be more detailed in the specific effects of the project than will be an EIR on the adoption of a local general plan or comprehensive zoning ordinance because the effects of the construction can be predicted with great accuracy.

(b) An EIR on a project such as the adoption or amendment of a comprehensive zoning ordinance or a local general plan should focus on the secondary effects that can be expected to follow from the adoption or amendment, but the EIR need not be as detailed as an EIR on the specific construction projects that might follow."

This EIR fulfills the County's obligation to publicly consider the environmental impacts of the proposed *RTP/General Plan Update*, including a full discussion of mitigating policies and actions, mitigation recommendations, and alternatives that may serve to lessen or avoid the significant adverse effects identified herein. The County will weigh potential effects against the relevant overriding factors (economic, environmental and social) as part of the Final EIR certification process.

This process and information enables environmental considerations to influence the development of the RTP/General Plan and related planning initiatives and policies, thereby ensuring that the County's planning activities and policies will reflect consideration of potential environmental impacts and incorporate means to lessen or avoid such impacts where feasible. The timing of the CEQA process is concurrent with the development and review of proposed changes to the Mono County RTP and General Plan. The County is synchronizing these parallel processes to optimize public participation and avoid unnecessary duplication of effort.

3.5.2 CEQA COMPLIANCE FOR SUBSEQUENT ACTIVITIES

Following adoption of the updated General Plan & RTP by the Mono County Board of Supervisors, all subsequent activities and development within the unincorporated county will be subject to the policies set forth in the new General Plan and RTP. In addition to General Plan and RTP compliance, a number of activities undertaken pursuant to the General Plan and RTP will be subject to additional review and entitlement requirements. These additional requirements may include approval of tentative maps, design review, use permits, variances, specific plan and area plan approvals, and approvals based on consistency with applicable Airport Land Use Plans. Subsequent CEQA documentation will be required to implement specific projects arising from future RTP/General Plan updates and planning initiatives; this General Plan EIR may be used in support of these (and other) subsequent activities, as briefly described below.

Area Plans: Area plans have the same regulatory authority as countywide land use policies, but offer additional refinement and guidance consistent with the needs of the particular community area addressed. An area plan must be consistent with the General Plan, but is not required to address all of the issues contained in the General Plan. Area plans have been developed for every major population center in Mono County, and are incorporated into the *Draft Land Use Element* as area-specific policies.

Specific Plans: A specific plan is a tool for the systematic implementation of the General Plan. Adoption of a specific plan is a legislative act, similar to adoption of a General Plan or zoning ordinance. Once adopted, the Specific Plan establishes a formal link between implementing policies of the general plan and the specific development proposal for a given area. California Government Code (CGC) §65450-§65457 requires that a Specific Plan must be consistent with the adopted General Plan as well as any applicable Airport Land Use Plan. In turn, all subsequent site subdivision, development, public works projects and zoning regulations must be consistent with provisions of the Specific Plan. Specific Plan documents describe the distribution, location and extent of land uses, essential facilities and utilities, the

standards and criteria by which development will proceed, and implementation measures including regulations, programs, public works projects and financing measures to carry out Specific Plan elements.

Airport Land Use Plans: Areas located adjacent to public airports are subject to compliance with Airport Land Use Plans (ALUPs). ALUPs set forth specific land use measures intended to protect public health, safety, and welfare by ensuring orderly expansion of the airports and the adoption of land use measures that minimize the public's exposure to excessive noise and safety hazards in surrounding areas. An Airport Land Use Plan was adopted in 1986 by the Airport Land Use Commission for the Mammoth/June Lake Airport (renamed Mammoth Yosemite Airport), and Airport Land Use Plans have also been developed for the Lee Vining (2006) and Bridgeport airports (2006).

Tentative Parcel Maps and Subdivisions: A parcel map is required for the division of land into four or fewer parcels for the purpose of sale, lease, or financing. In Mono County, the Planning Commission reviews and makes determinations on tentative parcel maps following a public hearing during which the Commission receives input and comment. The Commission uses this input to set conditions and standards and to make findings as required by law. Once an applicant has complied with all tentative map conditions, the final map is brought before the Planning Commission for approval. In the case of tract maps, or divisions of land into greater than four parcels, the Board of Supervisors considers the recommendations of the Planning Commission in approving tentative and final maps.

Use Permits: A use permit (also known as 'conditional use permit') is a discretionary permit issued by the Planning Commission for land uses that are found to be in substantial compliance with applicable zoning and General Plan criteria under specific conditions. In Mono County, the Planning Commission reviews and makes determinations on use permits following a public hearing during which the Commission receives input and comment. The Commission uses this input to set conditions and standards and to make findings as required by law.

Variances: A variance is a grant of relief from the Land Development Regulations set forth in the Land Use Element that permits construction in a manner that would otherwise be prohibited. In Mono County, the Planning Commission reviews and makes determinations on variance requests, based on the standards set forth in *Land Use Element* Chapter 33 (Variance Procedures).

Design Review: The Mono County Design Guidelines assist property owners and project designers in fulfilling the County's goals for attaining high-quality development that reflects the unique character of Mono County and its communities. The guidelines do not dictate specific styles or themes, but rather provide flexible tools for creative and innovative design. Design review guidelines are used by the County as additional criteria for assessing land use permit applications including all single and multifamily residential, commercial, industrial, and public/institutional projects including additions, remodeling, relocation, and new construction. The county Design Guidelines identify eight central objectives:

- Respect Mono County's small-town scale and mountain/high desert setting;
- Use simple, clean forms that reflect the climate, the natural setting, and the county's remoteness;
- Articulate building forms and elevations to avoid 'boxiness' and create interesting roof lines, building shapes and patterns;
- Respect the county's natural features with designs that accommodate and enhance the project setting;
- Use landscaping to provide project amenities and screen parking, equipment and storage areas;
- Plan site access, parking and circulation in a logical, safe manner;
- Consider the design and placement of wayfinding signs early in the design process;
- Design spaces for outside equipment, trash receptacles, storage, and loading areas in the least conspicuous part of the site; and
- Incorporate sustainable development elements including green buildings, efficient and integrated design elements, use of durable local materials, operation of building systems at peak efficiency, and minimizing paved surfaces to preserve natural landscape materials and reduce runoff.

A formal Design Review District has been established for the Wheeler Crest community. Design Guidelines established for June Lake also require the June Lake Citizens Advisory Committee (JLCAC) to serve in a design review capacity on major projects on the June Lake Loop.

3.5.3 TIERING AND STREAMLINING

Another important intended use and purpose of this Mono County General Plan EIR is to facilitate 'tiering' to streamline CEQA compliance for future projects that conform to policies of the updated RTP and General Plan. The tiering concept allows later CEQA documents to incorporate and build upon, rather than repeat, the information contained in the RTP/General Plan EIR. CEQA §15152 provides a detailed outline of how and when the tiering process may be used to fulfill CEQA requirements for later projects, including tiering used in connection with a General Plan.

"(a) "Tiering" refers to using the analysis of general matters contained in a broader EIR (such as one prepared for a general plan or policy statement) with later EIRs and negative declarations on narrower projects; incorporating by reference the general discussions from the broader EIR; and concentrating the later EIR or negative declaration solely on the issues specific to the later project.

(b) Agencies are encouraged to tier the environmental analyses which they prepare for separate but related projects including general plans, zoning changes, and development projects. This approach can eliminate repetitive discussions... and focus the later EIR or negative declaration on the actual issues ripe for decision at each level of environmental review. Tiering is appropriate when the sequence of analysis is from an EIR prepared for a general plan, policy, or program to an EIR or negative declaration for another plan, policy, or program of lesser scope, or to a site-specific EIR or negative declaration...

(c) Where a lead agency is using the tiering process in connection with an EIR for a large-scale planning approval, such as a general plan or component thereof...development of detailed, site-specific information may not be feasible but can be deferred, in many instances, until such time as the lead agency prepares a future environmental document...as long as deferral does not prevent adequate identification of significant effects of the planning approval at hand.

(d) Where an EIR has been prepared and certified for a program, plan, policy, or ordinance consistent with the requirements of this section, any lead agency for a later project pursuant to or consistent with the program, plan, policy, or ordinance should limit the EIR or negative declaration on the later project to effects which (1) Were not examined as significant effects on the environment in the prior EIR; or (2) Are susceptible to substantial reduction or avoidance by... revisions in the project, by the imposition of conditions, or other means.

(e) Tiering under this section shall be limited to situations where the project is consistent with the general plan and zoning of the city or county in which the project is located, except that a project requiring a rezone to achieve or maintain conformity with a general plan may be subject to tiering.

(f) A later EIR shall be required when the initial study or other analysis finds that the later project may cause significant effects on the environment that were not adequately addressed in the prior EIR. A negative declaration shall be required when the provisions of § 15070 are met...

(g) When tiering is used, the later EIRs or negative declarations shall refer to the prior EIR and state where a copy of the prior EIR may be examined. The later EIR or negative declaration should state that the lead agency is using the tiering concept and that it is being tiered with the earlier EIR.

(h) ...Types of EIRs that may be used in a tiering situation... include, but are not limited to, the following: (1) General plan EIR (§15166); (2) Staged EIR (§15167); (3) Program EIR (§15168); (4) Master EIR (§15175); (5) Multiple-family residential development/residential and commercial or retail mixed-use development (§15179.5); (6) Redevelopment project (§15180); and (7) Projects consistent with community plan, general plan, or zoning (§15183)."

3.5.4 TIERING PURSUANT TO RESOURCE EFFICIENCY/CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

CEQA allows a local jurisdiction to tier environmental analysis from an adopted plan for the reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions that meets the following requirements identified in §15183.5(b)(1):

(A) Quantify greenhouse gas emissions, both existing and projected over a specified time period, resulting from activities within a defined geographic area;

- (B) Establish a level, based on substantial evidence, below which the contribution to greenhouse gas emissions from activities covered by the plan would not be cumulatively considerable;
- (C) Identify and analyze the greenhouse gas emissions resulting from specific actions or categories of actions anticipated within the geographic area;
- (D) Specify measures or a group of measures, including performance standards, that substantial evidence demonstrates, if implemented on a project-by-project basis, would collectively achieve the specified emissions level;
- (E) Establish a mechanism to monitor the plan's progress toward achieving the level and to require amendment if the plan is not achieving specified levels; and
- (F) Be adopted in a public process following environmental review.

The General Plan update includes a new Resource Efficiency Plan (REP) that sets forth Mono County's goals, policies and actions to achieve by the year 2020:

- a 10% reduction in emissions associated with energy use, water consumption, transportation, waste disposal, and agricultural practices, compared to 2005 emissions levels; and
- a 38 megawatts (MW) gain in renewable energy over baseline conditions.

The REP proposes approximately 120 actions relevant to the rural and mountainous nature of Mono County and considered politically, technically, and economically feasible to implement at this time. The proposed policies include implementing net-zero energy policies for County facilities, replacing and consolidating vehicles in the County fleet, and strategic opportunities to improve resource efficiency by residents, businesses, and visitors. The County has incorporated the policies and actions identified in the REP into the Land Use, Circulation, and Open Space/Conservation Elements of the General Plan. The County intends to adopt the General Plan and use the General Plan and REP as a plan for the reduction of GHG emissions. This EIR fulfills the requirements for environmental review set forth in §15183.5 (b)(1)(F). The tiering objectives described above will apply directly to future projects undertaken in concert with the county General Plan and REP when adopted.

3.6 LEAD AGENCY, AND KNOWN RESPONSIBLE AND TRUSTEE AGENCIES

3.6.1 LEAD AGENCY

Mono County is the designated Lead Agency for the project. In order to implement the project, the Mono County Board of Supervisors will be required to certify that the Final EIR has been prepared in compliance with CEQA, approve the proposed RTP and General Plan updates, approve the proposed planning initiatives, approve the proposed Mitigation Implementation and Reporting Program, and adopt findings. The Mono County LTC, a close partner throughout this process, will serve as a Responsible Agency with authority for consideration of this EIR and approval of the proposed *Regional Transportation Plan* (RTP). Table 3-2 lists the specific recommendations and approvals to be considered by the Planning Commission, the Board of Supervisors and the Local Transportation Commission, as well as project components that are not subject to formal action.

Table 3-2: Approvals Associated with the Current Project	
DECISION MAKING BODY	ACTIONS
Planning Commission Recommendations and Board of Supervisors Approval Actions	Approval of the General Plan Update
	Certification of the General Plan EIR
	Approval of the Integrated Waste Management Plan
	Approval of the Conway Ranch Specific Plan
	Adoption of the Noise Ordinance
Local Transportation Commission Approvals	Regional Transportation Plan
Incorporated into RTP/	Biomass Utilization Study
	Capital Facilities Policies & Transportation Improvement Projects

General Plan and approved therewith	Main Street Revitalization Efforts
	Character Inventory and Design Guidelines
	Countywide Trails Planning
	Resource Efficiency Plan
	Landownership Adjustment Report
	Biological Conservation Policies
	Watershed Plans
	Bicycle Transportation Plan
	Blueprint Plan
	Grading Regulations

3.6.2 APPROVALS BY RESPONSIBLE AGENCIES

According to CEQA Guidelines §15381, the term “responsible agency” includes all public agencies other than the Lead Agency that may have discretionary actions associated with the implementation of the Mono County RTP and General Plan Update, or aspects thereof. Since future implementation decisions may occur over the span of a decade or longer (the time during which the RTP and General Plan may remain in common use), Responsible Agencies cannot be known with certainty over the life of the project. However, the Mono Local Transportation Commission (LTC, which has approval authority over the RTP) is expected to be the principal Responsible Agency for the project. In addition to the Lead Agency approvals listed above, the EIR may be used by other public agencies that will consider separate permits and approvals required to implement various General Plan/RTP components. Additional Responsible Agencies under CEQA may include:

- *Caltrans (to monitor the RTP planning process and approve actions that would impact State Highway rights of way),*
- *The California Resources Agency (for activities involving natural, historical and cultural resources),*
- *US Forest Service (for actions that would impact public lands managed by the USFS),*
- *Bureau of Land Management (for actions that would impact public lands managed by the BLM),*
- *Town of Mammoth Lakes (for actions that would impact lands inside the Town boundaries),*
- *The California Housing & Community Development Department (for activities that may impact housing supply, affordability and condition)*
- *The Public Utilities Commission (for activities that may involve privately owned electric, natural gas, telecommunications, water, railroad, rail transit, and passenger transportation companies),*
- *The California Department of Conservation and related divisions (for activities pertaining to the state’s geology, seismology and mineral resources),*
- *The California Energy Commission (for activities that may impact energy demands, conservation and energy efficiency, energy technology, renewable energy resources and technologies, thermal power plants and energy emergencies),*
- *California Highway Patrol (for activities that may affect public safety, traffic & emergency response, and public property and infrastructure integrity and safety),*
- *California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (for activities that may impact fire protection, emergency response, and stewardship of wildlands for fire safety),*
- *Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board (for activities that may impact water quality, the beneficial use of water resources, and management of water quality problems associated with human activities),*
- *State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) for activities involving resources that may have historic significance),*
- *US Federal Highway Administration (for actions pertaining to the Scenic Byway designation),*
- *City of Los Angeles (for actions that would impact lands owned by the City),*
- *Great Basin Air Pollution Control District (for actions that would require consistency with the adopted air quality management plans),*
- *US Fish & Wildlife Service (for special species and habitat studies),*
- *Local special districts (fire, water, public utility) for activities that may impact service capacities/ resources or require district permits, and*

- *Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) for activities related to boundary adjustments and change of organizations related to agencies such as special districts and incorporated areas, including municipal service reviews and spheres of influence.*

3.6.3 TRUSTEE AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION OVER PROJECT AREA RESOURCES

According to CEQA Guidelines Section 15386, the term “trustee agency” means a state agency having jurisdiction by law over natural resources affected by a project, which are held in trust for the people of the State of California. Trustee agencies that may have jurisdiction over resources associated with the RTP and General Plan updates include:

- *The California Department of Fish & Wildlife, for activities that may involve fish & wildlife of the state, designated rare or endangered native plants, game refuges, ecological reserves, and other areas administered by CDFW;*
- *The State Lands Commission, with regard to State-owned "sovereign" lands, such as the beds of navigable waters and state school lands; and*
- *The California Department of Parks and Recreation, for activities that may impact resources of the State Park System including Bodie State Historic Park, and Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve.*

The determination that Mono County is the “lead agency” is consistent with CEQA Guidelines §15051 and §15367, which define the lead agency as the public agency that has the principal responsibility for carrying out or approving a project. This Draft EIR reflects the independent judgment of the County regarding the potential environmental impacts, the level of significance of impacts both before and after mitigation, and the mitigating policies, actions and measures proposed to reduce impacts.

3.7 IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULES

The Housing Element was approved by the Mono County Board of Supervisors and became effective on 10 June 2014. All provisions, goals and compliance requirements of the updated General Plan/RTP Land Use, Circulation, Safety, Conservation/Open Space, Noise, Integrated Waste, and Housing elements and implementation of the REP will take effect upon the date that the Board of Supervisors certifies the Final EIR and approves the General Plan/RTP Update project. Implementation of all other related planning initiatives will vary depending on funding availability, priorities for community improvements, and development timelines for individual projects subject to requirements of the various regional planning projects.